

CLOSING THE GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, today the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence issued a very important report on "Guns and Terror," and they pointed out the link between terrorist activity and our lax gun law in the United States. It is a compelling report that should urge us to action. We have seen throughout the last few weeks newspaper reports indicating terrorists are exploiting our lax gun laws, particularly when it comes to gun shows.

When Attorney General Ashcroft testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on December 6, he held up an al-Qaida manual and talked about how terrorists are instructed to use America's freedom as a weapon against us, and he talked about the way they are urged to lie to deceive our law enforcement authorities.

He neglected to point something else out. These terrorists have been trained to exploit our gun laws. A few weeks ago, I mentioned a terrorist manual was seized in Kabul in which these jihad trainees were urged to obtain an assault rifle legally, enroll in American gun clubs to take courses in sniping, general shooting, and other rifle courses. We have to understand if this is their playbook, using gun shows is one of their plays and we have to stop this loophole.

I introduced legislation last year based upon the Lautenberg legislation this Senate passed. I hoped we could bring this legislation to the Senate very quickly, and we could move to close this gun show loophole, that we could apply the Brady law to every purchase at a gun show, that we could ensure there is a full-time period for law enforcement to evaluate, up to 3 days, the purchase.

These things are necessary. I think it would be a mistake to delay further, and I think also it would be a mistake to take and embrace a weaker version of the law when we have already passed a corrected bill that can make huge progress in closing off this loophole.

We already know individuals on behalf of Hezbollah have used gun shows, that individuals on behalf of the Irish Republican Army have used gun shows, that American militia movements have used gun shows. They do that because they know they can go to the shows, find unlicensed dealers and avoid any type of Brady background check. So I hope we could move very promptly in the next session to close this loophole.

There are 22 cosponsors of my legislation. It is a bill we have already passed in the Senate. It is something I believe is long overdue and I hope indeed we can do it to ensure terrorists do not exploit our laws to do damage to our country and to our people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The major majority leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I compliment the distinguished Senator from Rhode Island for his comments now

and for the leadership he has shown on this issue now for several years. Our caucus and the Senate owe him a debt of gratitude for the job he has done in sensitizing us to the importance of this legislation and our efforts to address this issue.

As the Senator noted, this legislation has a very favorable history. Senator Lautenberg, our former colleague from New Jersey, has also worked with the Senator from Rhode Island to pass this legislation at some point in the past, and because it has such overwhelming support I am confident this Senate can pass it as well.

The Senator has talked to me on several occasions about the importance of taking this legislation up this session. It is regrettable at least to date we have not had the opportunity to do that. I share the Senator's expressions of urgency with regard to the consideration of this legislation, and as I committed to him privately I will commit as well publicly that we will take this legislation to the Senate, hopefully early in the session next year.

There is no reason why we cannot complete our work. There is no reason why the Senate cannot go on record again, as it has before in passing this bill, and send a clear message, at least when it comes to the gun show loophole, that we can take steps to protect ourselves and protect this population, and find ways in which to do it in a reasonable way. That is what the Senator is asking.

Again, as I say, I thank him for his leadership, his commitment, and I will work with him to assure this legislation can be taken up successfully sometime next year.

Mr. REED. I thank the majority leader for his kind comments.

Mr. DASCHLE. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. I thank the Chair.

ELECTION REFORM

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, it is after 6 p.m. in the evening and I suspect that many normal people are sitting down having dinner, enjoying a quiet moment with their families. I hope in fact that many of our colleagues are doing that since there are no longer any votes this evening. We are about to make an announcement, my colleague and friend from Kentucky, and, if he can make it, our colleague from Missouri, along with my friends from New York and New Jersey and others who have joined us in crafting an election reform compromise.

Mr. President, the Chamber may be sparse in participation at this late hour and it may be after working hours for most, but may I suggest what we are about to introduce is "landmark" legislation. It will have been 36 years, I think, since the last time this body dealt with the issue of voting rights from a Federal perspective. The Voting Rights Act was the last major civil

rights legislation dealing with the voting rights of the American public.

I begin these remarks by, first of all, expressing my deep gratitude to my friend from Kentucky who has been my chairman on the Rules Committee, and is now my ranking member on the Rules Committee, for his efforts, and those of his staff and others over these many weeks in putting this proposal together which we now offer to our colleagues as a bipartisan compromise. Our hope is that on our return, at some early date—and again, we will ask leadership for advice and counsel—we might bring this matter before the Senate when we return to the second session of Congress to adopt this election reform proposal.

Everyone is aware of what the world was like a year ago when the major story was not about Afghanistan and terrorism but about the condition of the election system in the country, particularly the events surrounding the Presidential race. I am not here today to talk about what happened. What happened last year was not an occurrence in one State or one election but a wake-up call for everyone about the deteriorating condition of our election system across the country. This does not happen on one night, in one State, in one election. There has been a lot spoken about that race, those particular events.

We have tried with this bill to look forward and not look back as to how we can respond to this in a responsible way so we may live up to our historic obligations in this Chamber to see to it that the rights of all Americans—specifically, the most fundamental of rights, the right to vote—is protected and the votes are counted.

Thomas Paine said very appropriately more than 200 years ago that the right to vote is "the primary right by which other rights are protected."

It is about as basic a statement and basic a right as we can identify.

The very credibility of every other action we take as a people, not to mention as a Congress, but as a people, in this Chamber and elsewhere, depends upon the American people's belief in the integrity of the election system which puts everyone in these seats as well as the seats occupied in every office, from the lowest political body in the country to the most exalted in the Presidency of the United States.

This bipartisan compromise we introduce today is not a condemnation of the past at all but rather a reflection of the promise of the future. The problems faced by voters across the Nation last November served, as I said a moment ago, as a wake-up call that our system of Federal elections was in serious need of reform and help. That is what we tried to do with this bill.

This is landmark legislation. Our task is to provide the necessary Federal leadership and resources to assist State and local officials without in any way usurping their historic responsibility to administer Federal elections.